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Fiction (English)



Gale
New

BARTY'S STAR

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BARTY'S STAR

BY

Rowland
NORMAN GALE

Author of

"A Country Muse," "Songs for Little People,"
and "A June Romance"



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1

BARTY'S STAR.

CHAPTER I.



BARTY—short for Bartholomew—wished to be made clear in his mind about the starry syntax of the heavens. His first grievance, in so far as celestial matters were concerned, was the strange conduct of the somebody or the something guilty of biting a huge silver mouthful out of the moon, treating it as if it were nothing handsomer than a bun. I sank in his estimation when I offered the true reason. It seemed so flatly, so egregiously, absurd, that the romantic mind of infancy refused to entertain it for a single moment. Partly from native genius, partly from native obstinacy, my small son—whom I sometimes used to offend for several hours by calling him Bartimæus, a

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name which his dread of ridicule magnified into a covert insult—gave his wits to the birth of a theory deserving high praise from Simplicity herself; a theory for which I have ever since had rather more than a sneaking fondness; which, upon occasions, when romance has been uppermost in my moods, I have accepted and been thankful for with a real and reaching cordiality, even to the extent of putting half-a-crown into Barty's money-box. When Barty was wont to dash off his impromptu explanations of tides, or lunar waxings and wanings, or comets, his tongue could scarcely perform its appointed service at a fast enough rate; the essence of eagerness sparkled in his eyes, and a magically nimbus, coming I know not whence, appeared to surround his head. God bless the little magpie! With what portentous labour do our dry-as-dust astronomers sift suggestions, weigh atoms, measure speeds, and bring into public notice fresh conjectures as to the original scheme by means of which the round and running giants were started upon

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their long journeys in monstrous jackets of flame! And behold, there was Barty, as yet unable to boast five full summers, who could produce a delightful hypothesis between his plucking of a Solomon's seal and an auricula. If any devotee of exactness demands to know which of the rivals, Barty or the academic observer, was the nearer to likelihood, I must of necessity give the second place to my illuminated Jackanapes; but as even the Royal Astronomer himself is little more than a fumbler, I prefer the colours and raptures of Barty's theories to the austerity of those put forward by his senior. Ask a scientific gentleman why the ocean is never absolutely at rest, and he will give you the true cause of this perpetual movement. When I asked Chatterbox the Golden, he very quickly offered a solution, beside which the information signed and sealed by his elder was tame to a degree. I fear none but little folk in pinafores will believe Barty to be correct in this particular case, but I wish he were.

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"The sea's always moving its back, it is," he said.

"Yes. Do you know why?"

"Because a great, big, large, huge monster under the sea wags and wags and wags his tail."

"Indeed. May I ask why he always wags his tail?"

"Because all the little fish tickle him."

"Thank you, Barty. Perhaps you can tell me why treacle is so soft, when rocks, as a general rule, are hard?"

But at this exciting moment, just as Barty's mouth was getting full of words, his mother snatched him up in her arms, kissed him, and declared that he should not be treated in such a fashion any longer.

The devouring agent in Barty's theory to account for the gradual growth and fading of the moon was a black mouse, so portly that it could not get through our lodge-gates—a detail which the mouse's creator always insisted upon whenever his friends and relations turned the

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conversation towards this vexed question—with a bad habit of nibbling at the sun's go-between. This black mouse, being of a contrary nature, always fed on brightness. It nibbled and nibbled and nibbled. To be brief, it nibbled. But it never quite contrived to swallow the last morsel, because a cat as long as Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square—which Barty had carefully inspected when he first paid Charing Cross the compliment of his beauty—came gambolling through the sky and frightened it away from licking up the crumbs that had fallen—who on earth knows where?—during the course of the meal.

"What does the cat gambol on?" I asked at the time when Barty invented this legend; "for the sky isn't a gravel path or a tessellated hall or a grassy lawn."

"No, but it's a blue lawn," replied the sage, evidently disdainful of my ignorance.

"A blue lawn? Very good. I concede the point."

Then, the mouse—(Barty was dreadfully

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offended once when I spoke of his apparition as a rodent. He generally turned glum when I employed a word he did not understand, and refused to fire off his penny pistol in my presence. Just like him!—being driven away miles and miles till it reached a hole where it could attend to digestive processes without fearing its pursuer, the few crumbs of moon began to grow.

"How's that, Barty? They can't grow; they aren't mustard and cress. My boy, let me beseech you not to deceive a trusting and a doting father."

"They grow just like the grass, of course," said this bigoted astronomer.

"But I don't know how the grass grows."

"Yes, you do, Daddy. It grows like nettles."

"Very well. I was only asking for information."

So the moon grew again beautifully, and the cat conveniently retired in order to allow the mouse to resume nibbling. The chase, the

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digestion, the increase, the fresh attack of the destroyer—thus the story continued for ever. Barty was extremely proud because his tale had no end, as the tales in books have. These he considered to be defective, inasmuch as their tellers had appointed boundaries for them. Now that he is older he still thinks very small potatoes of authors because they cannot write stories which go on for ever; and, when one comes to think about this peculiarity, it certainly is weak of them.

By communing with Barty's original intellect I began to see how foolish I had been to rest content with such a lot of customary notions. I made up my mind to learn as much from him as I possibly could before he grew up and became one of the common human atoms. In those early days of directness, when his unconventional philosophy and imagination united in such a stimulating amalgam, it would have been almost criminal upon my part had I persisted in neglecting the fountain of his wisdom. I am ashamed of myself for thinking so long

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that I knew more than children. What ridiculous vainglory! The most precious knowledge, I see now, belongs to the milk-tooth stage of existence. As children grow up they gradually forget the details of the world from which they last came. I used to wonder why they stared so strangely when I told them a simple fact in simple language.

Now Barty has cleared up that mystery, just as he has cleared up several others. When children fix their eyes upon their elders in that manner, they are not marvelling at the information: they are wondering, I believe, why things on this earth are so different from the things on the earth from which they are, comparatively speaking, recent arrivals. Our atmosphere is hostile to their ancestral memories. The moment they draw breath here they begin to exhale recollections of their former globe, so cunningly does the Overseer prevent them from the pains incident to comparisons. Luckily the knowledge goes away at a gentle rate of speed, and thus we are enabled to get a few hints.

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Is it not almost agonising to reflect how painfully memory must shrivel before the newcomers are able to understand our speech? Steady any child's eyes for a moment, let his look pierce yours—this is easier than for yours to pierce his—and perchance an inward light may appear to play upon and warm your brain. This is not always so. When it is so, then your memory returns and breaks over the old shells, so faintly, so faintly, as if she were the most musing of all gentle sea-tides. I suppose I was once as wise as Barty. I hope so; and I hope I gave a share of my deep knowing to some adult person, just as this sage of nearly five years has imparted some of his to me. Of course we never were upon equal platforms. Understanding this from the outset, I did not resent the signals of impatience which often twinkled in his eyes when my clumsier intelligence, sated by custom, overloaded with imitations and borrowings made as my wisdom little by little declined, failed to work as quickly, as pointedly as his own. Remembering how

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rapidly this world eclipses the last, I did all in my power to confront Barty with what I imagined—it was the merest guess-work—might be opposites to things seen and heard in that climate whence he has so wonderfully travelled; and I tried to keep on my best behaviour, in so far as dangerous nicknames and polysyllables were concerned, lest, offended, he should fall into a state of silence. Fortunately, there were few occasions when I could not open his mouth by the key of finance. Evidently his past life was spent where monetary symbols were either not employed at all, or were entirely different in character. Barty could be corrupted by even the smallest coin of the realm. I have made extraordinary mental purchases from him at the cost of a farthing; and often have received nothing in exchange for a bribe forty-eight times larger. This would happen when certain mundane novelties, too marvellous to encourage in his brain remembrance of joy and strangeness in other shapes, pulled him away from thoughts of his earlier playgrounds, business

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localities, and domestic concerns. When I looked at Barty, as I was never tired of doing, whether he were grimy or fresh from the sponge, I felt sure he was a good husband and father long ago; and I thought he must have had good children who were an honour to him, who hastened from the ends of their earth when they heard Death's arrow was quivering in so treasured a target, anxious to place their bowed heads beneath his blessing hands, eager to catch the uneasy words labouring from his dying lips.

In the presence of flowers Barty was more silent than at any other time. When lupins were blossoming, I found it very difficult to extract from him information of the sort for which I suffered so keen a thirst. With some flowers close at hand he would be moderately communicative; with others near he would not open his mouth. His eyes almost spoke to those that silenced him. A small perplexity gathered between his brows.

"Are you not old friends of mine?" he

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seemed to ask them. "Where have I seen you before? Tell me." And he always appeared to be waiting, waiting, waiting for the answer. Did he once dwell, think you, in a land of speaking flowers? It is possible. It hurt my heart to watch him when he stood in front of a lupin, his queer little pucker making a vertical trench between those lustrous eyes of his; and especially was I grieved if, when the boy was standing thus tranced, thus greedy for a petal to reply, thus sore at the closed mouths of old companions who, as it seemed, once used to exchange sweet syllables with him, the nurse came with the news that dinner was ready. It was sad to see Barty's dumb protest. Not a foot of lawn did he cover without turning his head in hopes to catch the accents of long ago. I think I can tell what he saw once upon the planet whence he journeyed hither. Snowdrops, or some flowers extremely like, yes; roses, yes; lupins, never! He accepted snowdrops, crocuses, carnations without comment; but he shouted for joy

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when he first saw a crown imperial, a lupin, a monkshood, and, without exaggeration, upon experiencing each glorious surprise, leaped six inches upward and outward from his mother's arms.

When he was four years old he most loved such blossoming spires as lupins, larkspurs, and hollyhocks, from which I gathered that his late home was rich in tall flowers, and he would listen to the foxglove's curtseying belfry so long that his mother's face began to wear a look of dread, for she feared that some mysterious magnets were exerting their influence to draw the boy away from her bosom. And, indeed, Barty always seemed anxious to follow the flowers that marched with such enthusiasm through the air in a heavenly direction. Had he been a contemporary of the immortal Jack, whose surname has been lost in the fog of ages, I doubt not he would have climbed beanstalks and carved monsters no less illustriously than the hero in the fairy-tale. Tall trees bewitched him. Well I knew

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what rents would gape in his knickerbockers when he came into his climbing years. I tried in vain to make him worship moss and other growths that cleave to the breast of the common mother, timid children that think themselves safest when cuddled close to the most generous of all bosoms. Your poplar is all for seeing the world, but moss has a stay-at-home heart. Barty's controlling desire was to look upward, and I have often seen him stand on tiptoe, flap his arms, and make efforts to fly, enamoured of the easy fashion of travel employed by birds. In his garden he would rarely consent to plant seeds of a lowly habit. Whenever I produced a packet of seeds—sleeping princesses whom the two sweethearts, soil and sun, were to kiss awake in right season—the child invariably asked, "Will they grow as tall as giunts?" If I described them as dwarfs, his eager eyes lost a shade from their brilliant colour, dulled because there was no promise of towering height in the brown specks. Ah, little son, little son, I used to reflect, do you search for ladders by

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which to escape from this prison of lawn and lilac and nursery and human regulations? Must your heart be for ever pressing against the invisible bars of this visible cage? Do the ascending flowers act only as signals for your direction? Never mind the lean poplar that pierces the heaven's blue cloth with a green needle; and never mind the ambitious lark that serves as a link between the music of earth and the melodies of paradise. Cease to imagine the stars are always beckoning to you with beamy fingers.

I am here reminded to mention Barty's uncanny powers of vision. On nights of extraordinary beauty, when the eternal diamonds in the firmament were displaying the chief of their lustre, the child was usually restive. Often he used to creep from his bed, run to the window, pop his head under the blind, and gaze at the glory above him with glories to us so precious that we would not have exchanged them for all the glittering couriers of space. I think God must have loved to watch him then

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—so fair, so fragile, so spotless an innocent holding converse with the heavens in the dead of night. I very well remember one particular occasion when I found Barty thus enraptured. Drawing up the blind, I revealed his starlit head, and asked him at what he was looking so steadfastly.

“That star between the trees.”

“Between what trees?”

“That and that.” He pointed a tiny forefinger at each of the boundaries.

Because my unassisted eyes failed to discover a star between the two elms which rose up just across the lawn, I put on my glasses. What was my astonishment to scan a piece of space, about the size of a large blanket and the colour of indigo, that was utterly without stars able to be glimpsed by grown-up vision? Barty—he was at this time not much more than three years old—insisted upon the presence of the luminary.

“Point, dear,” I said.

I knelt down and glanced along the slender

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index raised for the purpose of helping me. He was aggrieved when I again told him there was no star in the patch of heaven between the elms. Tears came into his eyes.

"I am telling the troof," he said, mistaking my emphasis for an accusation of falsehood.

Instead of answering, I began to wonder. Can children see their home in the last system from which they came? How soon, how gradually do they lose this from the firmament as all the mundane controls pull them away from their bright penetration and leave them with a lessened galaxy? As the last abode fades from sight, remembrance of its intimate beauties, its fragrances, its thorns, also fades, I suppose. Sad, is it not?



CHAPTER II.

WERE it a custom on the part of the nation to catalogue with exactness its illustrious noodles, as well as its masters in all ranks of thought and action, we should certainly know what was the name of the person who first gave tongue to the foolish statement that children should be seen and not heard. If I knew, to him or her I would raise in my memory a statue of disapproval more lasting than brass. I would not be thought to recommend the adoption of tactics so slovenly that the quicksilvery merrymakers should, when wronged by the absence of a proper restraint, grow into chatterboxes whose volubility is without wholesome boundaries; but I cannot help deploring the conduct of such parents as seem set upon making children into mutes. I am willing enough to grant the

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preponderance of the chaff over the wheat; but precious grain is sometimes to be discovered, and then, because of its matchless quality, it repays the harvester a hundredfold for his patience in winnowing the valuable from so much that is, if not quite valueless, at least of only a passing interest. When Barty, because of a gush of high spirits, used to degenerate into loquacity and sauciness, I took pains to mend his faults; when, on the contrary, he figured as a grave mark of interrogation, or as a commentator upon the open-handedness of Nature, I made it one of my chief objects in life to listen to him, in the hope of catching golden hints illustrative of his earlier existence. As bright heavens and beds exquisite with blossoms most caused him to reach back to his former home, I tried to keep his mind in the necessary grooves, though not manifestly, for fear of arousing self-consciousness in him. I was afraid lest the poet should conquer the historian, and the boy, perceiving the character of my require-

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ments, should begin to invent rather than to record. That is a dangerous moment when children first find themselves possessed of a power to spin webs from the silk of thought. The human caterpillars soon grow cunning.

Before I forget it, I must tell you about the opening of the iris. One morning, as soon as breakfast was over, and Barty arrayed for his usual scamper up and down the lawns—for the visits he paid every day to the blossoming kings and queens in the garden supplied him with plentiful exercise—he discovered that the pioneer among the irises had unfolded considerably since his overnight inspection. Straightway he fell a victim to the panic of joy. Too slow to suit his racing desire, his short legs carried him in search of a sympathiser, and he rushed headlong into my study, flags of excitement waving rosily in his cheeks, his golden nebula of hair blown into odd shapes by the breeze. He tried to explain the nature of his embassy, but could not, for his brain was too much exhilarated to

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attend to the minting of orderly explanations. But the language spoken by hands and feet and eyes was easy to comprehend without calling a Daniel to judgment, so I followed my nimble leader with all speed, assured of the urgency of the matter, and soon we stood hand in hand before the marvel causing Barty's whirlwind of emotion.

"Well, Bartimæus?"

The child was so deep in delight that the ear and the brain had suspended their harmonious agreement. I moved so as totally to eclipse the flower.

"Bartimæus!"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Do you want to show me something, Rosebud?"

Barty had as many nicknames as a rood of the Milky Way appears to have stars.

"Its mouf's nearly open," said the boy.

"Hush! I believe it will open ever so wide soon, if we don't frighten it by making a noise. Shall we watch it?"

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No answer. The bare idea made speech out of the question. Standing stock still in his blue blouse, one hand holding a wooden spade, the other now dropped loosely at his side, Barty stared intently at the miracle on the top of the stalk, with his radiant glances helping, as it pleasures me to imagine, the sun change the bud into a flower. I stooped to entangle a kiss with the nebula, and then walked away, knowing full well that the child's mind was too perseveringly occupied with the revelation of Nature's skill in packing to notice my departure. Exactly one hour later I walked along the path on tiptoe to see what had happened. The boy was where I had left him, still fixed upon his project. I went up close behind him, sat down upon a camp-stool, and opened the morning paper as rustlingly as I could, on purpose to make a fresh test of his abstraction. He did not heed. Dame Nature surely never had a prettier compliment paid to her genius. I had just looked up from

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the current crisis, when Barty said to himself very quietly, offending me and Lindley Murray's ghost in the same breath—

"Its muvver's unbuttoning its jacket like my muvver does."

A few minutes later he shouted in triumph—

"It's open! I heard it speak!"

I jumped up, flinging diplomatic complications underfoot. At last that industrious trinity — sun, soil, rain—had declared the velvety palace of the iris to be open for the inspection of fairies, butterflies, birds, and human beings.

"What did it say, Barty?"

"I don't know. It speaked wiv a pop."

"Spoke, not speaked. Have you ever heard irises speak before?"

"Ever so many," he said, in a tone belonging to the heartiest conviction.

"Where? Can you tell Daddy where?"

His characteristic pucker showed as a signal of perplexity. I watched him harking back, hunting for the lost trail, endeavouring to

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throw off the effects of that cup, full with nepenthe, held to his lips by Mystery herself at the very moment when was accomplished his transit from system to system. But he who mixed the draught was no apprentice. The drug sufficed.

"I—I nearly can, Daddy," said my little son.

"Never mind, dear. Don't you want to give our new friend a kiss?"

"Yes." With great gentleness he laid his lips upon the blue banners now spread out in the air.

"Look, Daddy! It has free tongues."

He was bending with joy over the first baby held up by the iris for the warm and windy palms of heat and breeze to fondle.

"Shall we pick it and take it in to mother? Poor mother's ill."

"Muvver has a klekshun of greenhouse," Barty replied, referring to some exotic flowers that were helping to make the sick-room cheerful.

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"Well, we'll leave it, then. See, it has a tiny sister just peeping out of her green bonnet."

"Will they tell one anuvver fairy tales?"

"Perhaps. Come along. I am going to teach you ever so many things about the sun and his big boys."

If I were to write down a full and faithful account of all Barty knew about astronomy before he reached his fifth birthday, my readers would probably charge me with romancing in a lavish manner; and yet, millions of Englishmen who have reached their ripe years know twenty times less than the mite of a boy did at this very green point in his career. He ate knowledge of this sort as the average lad eats an orange; that is, not without the semblance of greed. And because Barty so hungered and thirsted to learn the big letters in the starry alphabet, eager to read the scripture of the sky, his sleeping arrangements were altered so as to allow of his sitting up late some warm and regal nights

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for the purpose of listening to my informal lectures. With a comforter round his neck, and a small pilot jacket (of which he was disastrously proud) buttoned close about his fragile body, Barty drank in the elements of astronomy from such positions of vantage as my knee or my shoulder. Sometimes—as a very extraordinary favour conferred by mother, under whose dear brows there beamed two stars fit to be immortalised in the firmament—we were permitted to go on the leads, where we commanded all the timeous constellations, and felt, such was the pride begotten by our exalted position, as if we were almost able to put our hands upon the back of the Great Bear and to stroke his silver hide. There is surely no need to relate in detail what extravagant calls were made upon my learning and patience by this slip of a Zoroaster, nor how difficult it was to supply easy answers to his ceaseless crop of questions. For quite six months, if fine, out-of-doors, if wet, in his nursery or in my

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study, the boy and I laboured upon the solar system, the atmosphere, rainbows and other phenomena of frequent occurrence, although Barty made bewitching efforts to drag me farther afield in space, there to discuss such monsters as Aldeboran or Sirius. He was only won from these insinuating methods—he had a quaint trick of kissing each button upon my waistcoat when desirous of causing me to break my word—by a promise on my part to give him a lecture about some gigantic sun upon his fifth birthday. As he had reason to know how little like pie-crust his father's promises were, whether connected with scoldings or kissings, he would resume his study of Neptune or Uranus in a cheerful spirit. And what a faithful savings-bank his memory was when the pledge had joy at bottom! The Old Lady in Threadneedle Street could not have been surer had she used her strongest vault as a guardian for the delight not to be taken out and squandered till a certain date was reached. But there was a big hole

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in Barty's remembrance when the promise had sombre associations. A very big hole.

We used to put our heads together over maps of the solar system, and when Barty was master of such terms as orbit, diameter, circumference, he found a special delight in supplying me with information about every member of the sun's family, each item of which I gravely wrote underneath the big and little dots upon the rough chart I had drawn. He knew the pace of light, and how it was first measured; and he was moderately well informed about Saturn's rings, though I speak who should be silent. I do not think Barty and I were ever happier than when we had a blackboard on the lawn and considered diagrams while thrushes whistled their wonder from the ash opposite the front door. And how good it was to turn from Uranus to tea when mother and a maid came bearing milk and queen-cakes and other inducements for the cessation of our happy-go-lucky lessons! And how de-

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lighted Barty used to be whenever he found a dark companion revolving in the exceedingly weak fluid he was allowed to call tea! Bright fell the delicate evenings of those days, so prodigal in regard to immediate joy, so busy in harvesting stuff for recollection. My heart quickens always as memory paints this scene upon her magic canvas. It is always the same; it is always a surprise.

Although it was most difficult to persuade Barty to leave his obstinate questionings—ought I to employ inverted commas?—about the firmament's population, save when he pondered upon the speechlessness of those flowers which I like to believe were mates of his in a far-away home, or spent his soul upon such new acquaintances as love-lies-bleeding and gladiolus, I thought it good policy at times to endeavour to awaken in him other interests—a passion for Jack the Giant-killer, a desire to attend with more or less regularity to the creature-comforts of rabbits or fowls, a wish to learn how Horatius kept the bridge. But

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at this epoch in the boy's history I was never successful for long.

Guinea-pigs were but indifferent skids upon his astronomical wheels; and it was not till a certain Fifth of November, when I execrated the memory of Guy Fawkes, thus disobeying the injunction contained in *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, by aiming a rocket at Orion, that I bethought myself of kites and toy-balloons as means to prevent Barty from an unhealthy excess of botany and astronomy and musing. Forthwith I instructed him in the art so dear to Mr. Dick, and from the moment when we first sent our paper bird to swoop and curve in the blue territories above our heads, an endless source of amusement, an enduring magnet to distract the boy's mind from feeding too constantly on meteors and hollyhocks and mystical shreds of reminiscence, was found. We also procured a small captive-balloon, which always went upon its journey bearing what Barty fondly imagined to be a successful copy of himself. It certainly wore one of his

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blouses, and its sawdust legs were covered by a pair of his discarded knickerbockers and stockings; moreover, a flaxen wig and a sailor hat, which for long had falsely represented my son as devoted to Queen and country on board an ironclad, helped the resemblance. Barty always greeted this apparition with devastating cordiality whenever it returned safely from a voyage. To him this soaring image was fifty times more valiant than Benjamin Franklin and Fridtjof Nansen rolled into one.

If, by any chance, necessity compelled me to leave Barty to his own devices for the whole of a summer's day, he very soon drifted into one of his astronomical reveries, even though I had set him to dig for gold just beyond the cucumber-frame in the kitchen-garden. Upon a certain afternoon I returned home to find a strange posture of affairs. Barty had possessed himself of a pail of whitewash and a brush. With these he had mapped out upon the lawn, using a liberal space so as to manage the orbits with suffi-

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cient magnificence, a solar system, which held its ground for several weeks, in despite of brooms and rainfall, though in a faded fashion, as if the mimic planets had been changed from comely bodies to the thinnest of thin ghosts. A blob of whitewash represented the sun; lesser blobs stood for his companions, and the correct number of tiny moons clustered about the spheres of Jupiter, Saturn, and Neptune. The paths of all these planets were scrupulously shown, with a view, I think, to impressing Dick, the stable-lad, a young rascal as tightly crammed with innocent mischief as an egg is full of meat, from whose buoyant eyes fun and frolic seemed positively to leak. The whole work was as creditable to Barty's head as it was vexing to my heart; and, when I thought of the morrow's tennis-party, I felt inclined to send the culprit to bed. But what was this infant Kepler doing? Had he levanted after completing his picture, fearful lest my criticism should be alarmingly hostile, or was he watching my exasperated counte-

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nance from one of his innumerable hiding-places? No. There he sat, some distance away from Neptune's orbit, on a part of the lawn which sloped upward to the wall, perched on a high chair that he had dragged from his peculiar dominion—the nursery. He looked as grave as the Woolsack; the evening sun fell full upon his bare knees, and revealed quite a dozen small wounds caused by thorns and gravel and cats.

“What's all this, Barty?” I asked, taking care to let asperity be heard in my tones. “What are you doing there?”

“It's the solar system.”

“So I suppose. I hope you're ashamed of yourself for making such a mess. I feel very much inclined to put you across my knees. Go up into the nursery at once, instead of sitting there mumchance. I expect the fly-catchers think you are the silliest boy they have ever seen. I don't wonder. Why, in the name of goodness, are you sitting in that chair?”


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"I'm being God," said Barty.

I went indoors to find his mother. I thought she would like the violets from my button-hole. As I passed through the hall I met Barty's nurse, and I very soon heard the immediate result of the order I had given her. Screams rent the air. My small ape did not yield his throne without a struggle. The testimonial he suddenly issued touching the excellence of his lungs was far-reaching: it reached quite half-a-mile—quite! That evening ended in slaps!



CHAPTER III.

N the evening of his fifth birthday, after spending fully eight hours in his devoted service, I kissed Barty on the stairs as he was going to bed. Sleep had already hung her first veils over the brightness of his eyes. He had feasted without moderation upon delight ever since the moment when he awoke to find his mother's lips pressing upon his own, for she had stolen to his bedside with an early blessing, anxious to speak a prayer in God's ear as she knelt at that small but matchless shrine. He bristled with gifts, and what light still glittered in his beautiful eyes had partly come from Alpha Centauri, for, true to promise, I had taken the boy upon a tremendous trip in the course of the afternoon. Under each arm was tucked a cat, one adult, the other half-grown; and

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behind him walked his nurse, laden with socks, starched blouses, and a canary in a cage with bars the same colour as the bird, a feature of the prison which appealed to its owner with considerable force. With such pets Barty usually began the night, whether the cats were sleepy or wakeful. They, indeed, not seldom showed many signs of disgust, and, with furry fists and tails proclaiming anarchy, resisted from landing to landing this tyranny of early closing; but Barty, in the spirit of a Roman dictator, clung with resolution to his elastic slaves, despite the transport difficulties. The mother protested least, for experience had taught her that the nurse, with a spirit no less governing than Barty's, would come as soon as her young master was asleep, to flap an apron and bundle her downstairs. But release was not possible till she had played the hypocrite in Purgatory—that is, in Barty's bed, where she was wont to act a falsehood night after night, pretending, as soon as she had sworn for a few minutes

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in an undertone, a repose which was not sincere. When the boy's enchaining arm relaxed its hold, she crept out of bed inch by inch, and then waited for Lizzie to open the door and wave the apron. The time she could make from nursery to hall—true, the course was down-hill—would have astounded any official used to holding the watch during races. As for the canary, he was wont to hang on a nail not far from the window, where he began his shrill matins at an unearthly hour on summer mornings, while Barty lay and soaked in the music as if his ears were sponges, encouraging the songster from the bed with all manner of quaint sayings, to which, as he fondly imagined, the bird replied in crescendos of melody. There were occasions when I wished this ecstatic fowl in Hong Kong, since its piercing language travelled as easily through lath and plaster as the sun's rays explore the backs of the clouds whose fronts appear to us so gloomy. Sometimes, so destructive to the nerves was

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its lofty screaming, its voice had to be put out, as if it were a candle, by a cloth extinguisher, which transformed the bright cage into a dungeon of the darkest kind.

Well, Barty was going to roost with two cats and a bird for company; his pockets bulged with infantile treasures; he was, as it were, a walking robbers' cave. In his mob of hair he had thrust a pair of compasses which I had given him, as a mark of remembrance and congratulation; and round his neck was a silk wrap, sent by one from among his worshipping aunts. He laughed the victor's laugh as he squeezed the wriggling cats closer to his proud bosom.

"I am going to look for my burfday star," said he.

"I'll come too. Trot along. Hop upstairs, Goldfinch."

We sometimes called him by this name because his voice was so exquisite, and his hair so yellow—so yellow. I had to shut the door of the nursery before he would leave

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hold of his tabby burdens. This done, he set them free upon his counterpane, whence, nimble as spilled quicksilver, they immediately departed, one under the table, the other to a most advantageous position under the chest of drawers. The maid hung the canary in his place; Barty began to make his way toward the window.

"It's too early for stars, dear," said Lizzie.

"Why, so it is, Chicken. I had forgotten."

"I shall keep awake till it's ever and ever and ever so dark," said the young astronomer, using such a swelling emphasis upon the repeated adverb that the cat under the table thought it prudent to join her mother behind the chest of drawers, "and then creep——"

"And creep and creep," I suggested.

"Out of bed to look at it. I fink they will send it to-night."

"Who are they?"

"Oh, them," said Barty.

"Quite so. It was stupid of Daddy to ask. Why, you're yawning. Put your hand in front

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of your mouth, you rogue! When it's dark I'll peep and peep and peep in to see if you are asleep. I shall be such a quiet mouse."

"Then Jane'll eat you."

Jane was the elder of the cats.

"I'm not afraid. Good-bye. Kiss me twice, once for me and once for myself."

As I was leaving the room he called out—

"Daddy!"

"Yes, little man?"

"Are there any beasts in heaven now?"

"Beasts?"

"Ones wiv twenty-four eyes," the questioner explained.

I uttered an exclamation that caused the nurse to jump.

"There, dear, don't worry that golden head about animals to-night. Go to sleep, and have pretty dreams of mother."

"But it's such a lot of eyes, Daddy," mused Barty, who was by no means content to forego a lesson in unnatural history.

"Never you mind. Twenty-four eyes aren't

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nearly as good as mother's two. Just you dream about them, Goldfinch; you can't possibly do better."

I killed a coming remark with a kiss, walked quickly from the room, and went straight downstairs to ask the elder star of those twain that daily shine in my domestic firmament whether it would not, in the case of a child so imaginative as Barty, be discreet to confine all scriptural news within sweet and assuring boundaries, leaving the more startling episodes till he should come into his ripe years. If I could ever have been angry—the kind God forbid!—with the angel who has made these rafters into rainbows, who has enchanted these common floors, whose tireless thoughts for my increased content for ever cluster round my life as bees round a colony of Canterbury bells, it would have been when she allowed to trickle into Barty's brain matters belonging to the machinery of dread. Every fact rushed to that organ smeared with bird-lime. The boy

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remembered too well, and, holding the information constantly before his eyes, began with unconscious magic to transmute it, for it is the fashion of children to make dragons out of dogs, so to speak. Give them but inches, and they will take ells. Elongation, flames instead of breath, scales replacing fur, a couple of wings, a tongue three yards long by one yard wide, a den littered with thigh-bones and skulls—there is a portrait of the monster as gradually evolved by generations of children, or at least, child-like minds. Every child has a passion for size; a part of the heritage into which he comes at his birth is an unconquerable appetite for exaggeration—a pea is a pumpkin; a swallow an eagle. It is one of his prerogatives to make mountains out of molehills while he is young and growing into the courage necessary for the years when he will have to make molehills out of mountains, bracing himself to exchange with adversity such a hearty buffet as the Black Knight exchanged with the

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Friar, and to keep a smiling face and a generous heart, despite punishment received. Knowing Barty's delicacy of perception and his magnifying powers as well as I did, I was always fearful when I learned, as, for example, I did on the evening which I have been describing, that from the tender lips of his mother he had heard anything likely, when distorted in the workshop of dreams, to shake the heart of the boy in a fashion fierce and revolutionary. The sunshine of the Bible—there is the beam (I thought within myself) under whose influence I would have his soul forced! Do not, mother, trouble his little breast so soon!

A comment upon the conversation held between me and Barty's mother, shortly after the child had questioned me about Saint John's miraculous beast, was supplied more quickly than I had anticipated. About four hours after the boy had gone laden to bed, we were suddenly terrified to hear screams of fright proceeding from the nursery. Rushing

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upstairs three steps at a time, I dashed into the room, calling out—

“I'm here, Barty! What's the matter, my lamb?”

The lamb rushed from his bed and clung about my knees, the light coming from the passage revealing to me a face twisted by dread.

“Mother—nurse—light a candle! What is it, dear? No one shall hurt my boy!”

I tried to lift him from the ground, but he was fastened to his hold as firmly as ivy clasps the oak. I had the feeling that his delicate hands would bleed if they were forced to yield their grip, so I stood and waited for the high tide of agony to abate, without attempting to hurry the event. His mother knelt down and pressed his face to her bosom.

“Tell mother, sweet. Did something frighten him?”

Barty slowly lifted his head for the purpose of looking upon that heaven whence lightning

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had never flashed for his wounding. Horror zigzagged about his eyes, and the familiar firmness of his lips had crumbled into a pitiful weakness. I could feel his heart drumming against my leg at a rate which hastened the beat of my own.

"Tell her, then, sweet," pleaded the mother afresh.

"Anuvver Satan's fallen—fallen from—from heaven," sobbed Barty; "he's tumbled down my—my—my chimney, he has."

"You hear?" I said to his mother in a low voice.

She stretched up a hand to me in dumb acknowledgment of mistake. I kissed it.

"Little lamb, little lamb," she said, "it's all right. You've had a nasty dream."

"I've not, Mamma. He's there now—in the fireplace," cried Barty, his voice rising as he remembered the nearness of his enemy. "And it's my burfday."

His birthday! And to have it thus ruined by a second Satan!

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"Come, Barty," I said, "let me go, and I'll soon find out what's the matter."

I went up to the grate; something rustled loudly as I approached, with the result that Barty, in whom the stock of confidence due to his parents' presence was as limited as it was perishable, betook himself to fresh wailing.

"He's there; I know he is. He'll scratch, Daddy!"

At this prophecy I could not help laughing heartily, and as I did so I pulled from its place the gay parasol, which in summer did its best to brighten the hearth. The fluttering was now considerably increased.

"Bring the candle nearer, nurse."

She handed it to me, not without signs of silly fear, and immediately retired towards the door, ready for flight in case the intruder proved to be, as Barty protested, a second Father of Lies.

"Why," I exclaimed, peering down into the dark cavity, "it's a bird! It's a starling, Barty; I can see a bill the colour of a lemon,

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and he has such bright eyes, poor fellow. I think his tumble has damaged him, or perhaps he is even more frightened than my goldfinch. I've got him! How he pecks! Now, then, Barty, here's your fallen angel—all over soot."

The thistle of grief changed with astonishing swiftness into the rose of delight. Barty let fall the fold in his mother's dress, which had served him as a buttress while I explored the fireplace, and ran across the floor in his eagerness to see the bird in my hand.

"May I kiss his head?" he asked, tears and smiles living together upon his face, and celebrating there a radiant marriage.

"Wait till I've wiped it with my pocket-handkerchief," said his mother. "Now then, kiss and make friends, and remember that never, never, never will anybody ugly or cruel fall down your chimney."

"Most certainly not," I added. "Mind, nurse, you are never on any account to tell Master Barty stories likely to make him have

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bad dreams. There are plenty of simple and happy tales. Just now he needs to be fed on what is peaceful and contenting."

"Yes, sir."

"You quite understand?"

"Yes, sir."

We now held a Cabinet Council, for the purpose of deciding what our course should be in regard to the visitor who had fluttered our dovecot in such a thorough fashion. With Barty on my knee, his mother standing behind the chair, and the starling in my left hand (I wonder his galloping heart did not break against his ribs), this grave concern began. The child and the bird stared at each other with all their eyes, and when Barty put out a finger to stroke that lustrous top-knot, the starling, splitting his lemon-coloured dagger in two, squeaked his distaste for such fondling. How we all laughed at his funny voice and querulous temper!

"Now, Barty, what shall we do with this fellow? Shall we get twenty-three more like

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him, and then have them in a pie instead of four-and-twenty blackbirds?"

"Yes, Daddy!" He wriggled with joy at the prospect. The starling eyed him suspiciously.

"Would Barty like to be shut up in a pie with a lot of other little boys?" asked his mother.

"No," replied Barty, with much emphasis, nestling closer to me at the bare thought of being baked in an oven.

"Let the starling answer for himself," I suggested. "Now, sir, do you wish to be confined in a pastry prison and cooked in the kitchen range?"

To be sure of a reply I touched his pate. He squawked an undoubted negative.

"He says he should hate it, Barty. Shall we put him outside the window-sill and see whether he can fly away?"

"Let's," said Barty, who had become laconic after his harrowing experience.

The other Cabinet Ministers consenting, I flung up the window. The bird smelt free-

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dom and struggled to enjoy it. No brighter jewels ever flashed in a starling's head.

"I should think he will be likely to give chimneys a wide berth in future," said the elder angel, stretching out her forefinger to stroke the bird for a farewell. The diamond in her ring was shamed by the lustre of the living gems set on either side of the pale dagger.

"Kiss him good-bye, Barty."

When the child had gravely kissed the glossy crown, I opened my hand. The gaol that was built of flesh and sinew and bone being no longer a prison, Satan disappeared. Joy steered him through the darkness.

I was about to close the sash when Barty suddenly exclaimed—

"There's my star."

To me the gloomed patch of the horizon between the elms was as barren of stars as it had appeared to be a year ago, when I found the boy so intently drinking in the rays of the invisible sun.

"In the same place, dear?"

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"Yes."

"Is it as bright as it was?"

I heard the rustle of a dress behind me, and, looking over my shoulder, saw the child's mother bend forward, with apprehension showing in her eyes as she awaited the answer to my question. The silk upon her bosom dulled and glowed with rapid alternations, as unspeakable dread caused her heart to travel at the pace set by that sweetest of jealousies—a mother's love.

"No," said Barty, "it's more teeny-weeny."

"Thank God!" was whispered behind me.

In my turn I reached a hand to her as a sympathetic signal. She held it on her breast, where it cupped the slowing heart.

"Are you sure, Barty? Why are you crying again?"

"I don't know; it's—my little pigs are all cold."

We laughed at this sudden leap from affairs celestial to an atom of nursery lore.

"Can we find room for Barty in our bed to-night, mother, do you think?"

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"Certainly."

"He can lie between us and be as snug as a nut in a peach."

"No," she said, "not even the lambkin shall come between us. You have him on your side."

"No, you. I sometimes think I steal him from you too often."

"Nonsense. Let me take him and pop him into bed."

When they were gone I returned for a moment to the window, drew up the blind, and looked out upon the gorgeous night. Heaven seemed to drip with stars; they oozed out of its floor, forming superb stalactites. There was no atmospheric reason why Barty's sun should appear smaller to him; on the contrary, the clearness was all in favour of its nobler presentation. Half in gladness, half in sorrow, I was forced to conclude that this world was eclipsing the last whence Barty had journeyed. That inevitable drug which is compounded of the Overseer's poppies was taking effect.

CHAPTER IV.



HERE was no room for doubt. Fate's loaded dice fell as Barty's mother would have them fall, and no gamester ever stared at the cubes as she, in her passionate anxiety, stared day by day at the outcome from the magic box. How she would have cheated, had the power been hers so to behave! Against her will she was compelled to stake Barty. Small wonder, then, that a fever so often burned in her eyes, as she watched the wealth lying upon the board at which she was forced to attend while a professional gambler threw for what represented to her the very centre of heaven upon earth. But Fate could not throw the right number. Ever so slowly, but ever so surely, some almighty Onlooker was pushing the stakes over to the human side of the table.

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In return for this, Barty's mother thanked God, since her heart quaked at the thought of having too mysterious, too starry a child. To her mind his dim and unconscious witchcraft spelled disaster. The playgrounds of Paradise, she imagined, must needs be incomplete without the little son in whom petals and odours belonging to another world so strangely survived. Because of this dread she greeted with exquisite joy any small proofs that the child was approaching nearer to the commonplace.

Quickly and convincingly signal followed signal. The sleepy potion acted; and Barty, drugged out of knowledge precious beyond every mineral magazine in all the cooled worlds running through space, unknowingly shed the evidences of his immortality. They fell from him as rose-leaves fall from the rose when that princess among the blossoms agrees with the wind for her unrobing. Although his love for flowers prospered just well enough to please his mother, the edge

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of it, so to speak, became a little blunt. Orderliness usurped the seat of ecstasy. As for such rocketing heroes as lupins and fox-gloves and monkshoods, he still showed his preference for them, although his periods of devoted worship were shorter in duration and rarer in repetition. Still, the borders where these favourites lived their lives did not fail to attract him far more than camps of crocuses, or settlements of lavender, or squadrons of geraniums could ever do. But one day I found him sitting by the larkspurs examining the boiler of a toy-engine with all the gravity possible in an engineer grown grey in the study of pistons and safety-valves. He was decaying from the past; he was ripening for the future. Sometimes, when perched upon my knee to have a lesson in celestial grammar, after listening in an absorbed fashion for perhaps twenty minutes or half-an-hour, he would begin to rummage in his pocket for a striped marble, or that innocuous pistol of childhood whose bark is

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worse than its bite, and from that moment would divide his attention between the plaything and the meteor. Or he would fidget with the band of my Norfolk jacket, and finally would interrupt me by asking whether he might go and look for his lesser divinity in fur. Who could fail to be persuaded that the slow processes of topsy-turvydom were taking place in the kingdom of his brain? Puss-in-Boots and Dick Whittington had utterly failed to magnetise his fancy when he was three and four years old; but, as he departed from musing, from visions seen through a dark glass, he developed an increasing hunger for stories dealing with episodes in the careers gloriously accomplished by Little Red Riding Hood, the Three Bears, and Shock-Headed Peter. I wonder how many times he rode to York with Dick Turpin. The flowers would not answer; the star persisted in becoming smaller; so Barty was the more easily induced to fix his eyes, his hands, his wits, upon the

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material of facts more comprehensible. He even altered sufficiently to maintain, with the stable-boy's help, a family of Belgian hares, one of which he christened Neptune, remembering the great hermit that marks this system's limit, because it would always remain in the back of the hutch while visitors were inspecting its kindred.

Just about this time, too, Barty became tainted by the slaying instinct, which, so far, repeated anathemas issuing from myself and his mother had chilled into quiescence. But we could do no more than render the horrible passion a torpid snake, which was sure to be warmed into liveliness by the sun of growth. One day a friend of his brought with him, as the apparatus for perfect joy, a butterfly-net and a poison-bottle; and when I looked from my study window to discover the reason for Barty's noisy delight, which carried nearly as far as the ball from a rifle, I saw my son plunging, with no thought for the morrow of my vexation, over a bed gay

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with calceolarias in his endeavour to catch a Red Admiral. From the suffering look on the rogue's face, I gathered that he did not admire as much as I did the masterly fashion in which this sailor of the air managed his fragile ship among the currents caused by the sweeping net.

Now, my garden is a reservation. It is the paradise of birds and butterflies. I net wall-fruit, and protect crocuses from the sparrows by using a lot of small stakes and black thread, but these are the severest measures I adopt; so, when I was a witness of intended murder, I threw up the sash with such a bang and roared at Barty with such vehemence that he sat down in the calceolarias as suddenly as if my voice had been a bullet striking him in a vital part. Leaping out on to the rockery, thus damaging several ferns, I proceeded to examine the delicate game destroyed by these imps. Three exquisite corpses lay on some cotton-wool in a box, while a Painted Lady (who named this child

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as kin to Jezebel?) was quivering to death in the bottle. The two culprits stood gazing solemnly at me as I delivered a brief but pointed sermon. They looked as if the proverbial butter would not melt in their mouths; it seemed impossible to think of them as guilty in any other respect than that of playing truant from the nurseries beyond the blue. For a few minutes I was vainglorious enough to imagine that I was making a real effect upon these flushed and panting savages, till another winged blossom came curving between the sinners and the preacher, when I learned how uselessly I had exhorted them to mercy. Immediately the lust for destruction sprang full-flamed into their eyes. Decorous their attitudes, polite their faces; but the rogues hunted in their hearts! Alas, of how many creatures the power to move is the death-warrant! If dandelions could fly they would be chased and slain without intermission by cherubs in all grades of society; but as these gipsies of the wayside

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only light their fires in the grass and wait in the same spot till they are burned out, they are spared such cruel instruments as are used by children, the parents conniving, for the massacre of flowers that have wings. I did not need Barty to tell me that the star was fading. It would, doubtless, soon appear to him no larger than the head of a pin in a pincushion.

Almost concurrently with the expansion of the desire to kill, there arrived, or rather, there revealed itself plainly in Barty's intellectual cosmos, the wish to be a maker. To be less and less a muser; to be more and more a builder—these were two of the chief articles in his evolution. About this time he was always hammering nails into wood, and he seemed hurt when I told him that planks could not feel. I will not shield my own son. It is a positive fact that much of his joy was at first derived from the hope that any material into which he drove nails was squirming in agony because of the operation.

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At this point in his life the duel between the star and the jungle was at its sharpest hour. Fully believing himself to be a torturer, upon one occasion, when his mother and I were absent from home, and when all the servants kept carnival in the kitchen, Barty drove nearly a hundred tin tacks into the front door. This feat pleased him greatly, but he was not at all charmed when, in the presence of the workman who repaired the damage, his money-box was wrested open by means of a chisel, and the bill forthwith defrayed out of its contents—a withdrawal of riches that left the destroyer with a balance of twopence three farthings. The boy, aided by the gardener, who, using diplomacy, persuaded him that all the houses were due to his skill as architect, contractor, and builder, supplied the rabbits with several deal villas; and whenever a new abode chanced to be finished, and the rooms carpeted with cabbage leaves and sawdust, these bewildered creatures were forced to change their quarters. Nep-

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tune, having a weak heart, and growing weary by thus being bundled from residence to residence, gave up the ghost with great suddenness, which, considering all the circumstances, was perhaps the wisest action ever performed by him in the whole course of his life. Even a Belgian hare's heart beats in sympathy with the world-wide belief that there is no place like home. How, then, should a spotlessly white trough make up to Neptune for the grubby trench in which he had nosed his first bran? When Barty realised that the rabbit had munched his last lettuce, he, in the scriptural phrase, lifted up his voice. After this, it would be pure bathos to add that he wept, for the concluding verb is a hundred times too mild. How shall his grief be best described? Well, let me say, Barty's floods were out. The highest peak upon the Mount Ararat of his little mind was under tear-level for a short time. At last sheer exhaustion, and the thought of the pomp with which the

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deceased could be buried under a gooseberry bush, stayed his weeping. I witnessed the funeral, in my capacity as a friend of the departed. So did his mother, who secretly loathed Belgian hares in the gross. So did the two cats—held in position by the stable-boy—though they spat at the corpse in a most unbecoming fashion, and proved themselves utterly unfit to be mourners at a ceremony of this sort. There is no blood-brotherhood between cats and rabbits, and consequently the presence of Jane and her child at the grave was nearer to an insult than an honour. Had the positions been reversed, that is, had either Jane or her daughter been due to the earth, Neptune would certainly have impressed the survivor by his exquisite courtesy, for there is no more ideal mute than a Belgian hare. Into Pussdom there has not yet been born a Turveydrop.

When Barty took up the body by its ears preparatory to dropping it into the tomb, the

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zenith was reached, for the cats began to use their coarsest language and to make writhing bids for freedom, during which their claws cut not a few small trenches along Dick's bare arms, who, prepared to be wounded no further, dropped them as if they were hot coals, with the result that they put in a very smart piece of cross-country work, taking a large cucumber frame and a wheelbarrow almost in their stride.

While talking about Barty's passion for material creation, of which rabbit-hutches were the early symptoms, I am reminded of a scene that I witnessed with my own eyes. Occasionally I had a whim to spend a few hours in the hay-loft, where I read a book while enjoying the luxury of idling amid the perfume given out by the dried grass. On a sunny day it was most refreshing to look forth from the door in the wall over the green garden, where flowers and vegetables and fruit-trees flourished in excellence together; and this I was doing one morning,

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when I saw Barty coming towards the stables, carrying the high chair to which reference has been made in a former chapter. Mischief blossomed at full petals in his face. He called long and loudly for Dick, who at length appeared. I at once saw that, whatever their prank was to be, an understanding had been arrived at between them before this meeting, since the same flower bloomed in Dick's countenance as in Barty's. They left the chair standing near the stables, and went away hand in hand. Very soon Dick returned with a rabbit in his arms, which he put somewhere in the building. Again he went away; a great cackling ensued; then he came into view with a fowl for prize. What in the world were these rogues designing? What sportive egg were they about to hatch? I set my wits to work in order to fathom their plot, but found myself an indifferent copy of Daniel, for though a fowl and a rabbit were, so to put the matter, written on the wall, I could not translate

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the scripture. While I was wondering at the queer signs so far established, both the boys came upon the scene, this time with a captive guinea-pig. Lying at full length on a mattress of hay, I cautiously played the spy upon these conspirators. I had not long to wait for fresh developments. Dick went in at the harness-room entrance, taking the guinea-pig with him, and then shut the door after him. Next, Barty clambered on to the chair, smoothed the skirt of his blue blouse over his knees, and in a voice of heavenly treble made such a demand as taught me in a flash what was the base of his coming prank.

The first chapter in the Book of Genesis had appealed in a fashion so imperative to Barty's mind, that, lifted into freakishness by the lever of fancy, he felt urgent in his bosom the desire to have his own Garden of Eden, to behave there as if power were given him to call into existence animals belonging to his knowledge, and to pronounce a blessing upon his creatures. Well, I think we may

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take it for granted that in Paradise no lustrous resident, while looking down upon the antics of simplicity, was shocked for even a space of time brief enough to be measured by a single throb of the heart. Remembering what fragrant innocence lay at the root of this mimicry, I did not at once cause the fowl, the rabbit, and the guinea-pig to be freed from the custody of Barty's companion in this piece of pictorial behaviour. To tell the whole truth, I was rather anxious to find out the full details of Barty's plan, feeling sure that there would come to me during the unfolding of his method a chance to make an interruption so impressive that never again would my snowdrop of snowdrops among little souls dare to play with the Old Testament as a toy between my stables and my cauliflowers.

"Let there be a chicken!" cried Barty in a loud voice.

The revelation was complete. I had no further need for Daniel's assistance.

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No sooner had this command been given than Dick pushed the fowl into the open. It ran for its life. I found out afterwards that, pending its creation in the stable-yard, the bird had been imprisoned in a corn-bin, the rabbit in another, during the time when the guinea-pig was being torn from its domestic hearth. As the hen ran clucking in what she considered to be the direction of safety, Barty said—

“And God saw the chicken. And He liked it. And behold it was very good. And the mornings and the evenings was the first day.”

Up in the loft I bewailed his bad grammar, as I promised Master Dick a rating sufficiently shrewd to prevent him for the rest of his days in my employment from posing as an understudy to Barty in his character as a deity. Even Pylades, let us hope, was fine friend enough at times to meet Orestes with a refusal.

Charmed by his success with the chicken,

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Barty proceeded to fresh feats. Not even the Solar System itself was graver than he at that moment; pomp flourished upon his resolute lips.

"Let there be a rabbit!"

At this behest Dick thrust the Belgian hare into the sunlight. And there was a rabbit.

"And God saw the rabbit," quoth Barty from his high seat, staring very hard at the blinking creature on the ground. "And behold it was pretty good. So the evenings and the mornings was the second day."

At this point Barty lost dignity in my eyes, for he got off his throne to scare the last-created animal into a bed of cabbages. This done, he resumed his state. Another order issued from his lovely mouth:—

"Let there be a guinea-pig!"

The guinea-pig arrived, all ready whiskered and furred and snouted. It ran about as if worked by mechanism. It was praised by its maker, and, this commendation accorded, we reached the end of the third day.

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Then cried Barty in the most important voice at his disposal—

“Let there be a boy!”

Thus commanded, Dick stepped out from the room in which he had worked the oracle so successfully. He resembled the rabbit in this, that he blinked very much as he stood there, the latest product of this unhallowed genesis. It was comical to see a broad grin gradually disappear from his face when he observed the austerity of his playmate. Barty eyed him from top to toe with surpassing gravity, as if weighing his merits and demerits in the balances, and then remarked—

“And God saw the boy. And behold it was very good. And there was boy. And the mornings and the evenings was the fourth day. And that's all I'm going to create till to-morrow; so, Dick——”

There had now arrived a moment in all ways fitted for a bolt from the blue. It fell, together with a mass of loose hay, at the second of time when the mood of the theatre

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was the conqueror of all other moods in Barty's imaginative brain; and because of this the effect was all the more tremendous. A deep voice asked from on high—

“Bartholomew, Bartholomew, why hast thou done this thing?”

It is not too much to say that a sudden clap of thunder could not have terrified the young artists more effectively. I think Barty believed the world to have crumpled up like a piece of tissue-paper. Shaking off the impediment, and quite forgetting to examine its simple kind, he sprang to his feet and plied his legs with such extraordinary agility, no more choosing his path than had many a fugitive before him, that he soon went head over heels into a bed of Jerusalem artichokes, among which sacred vegetables he bewailed his sins no less lustily than Moses did his loneliness when he was anchored in the bul-rushes. His lamentations acted upon his mother as a magnet upon steel filings; and it was not long before Barty was retrieved

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from his ignoble situation, kissed and cooed at till he told, with many sobs, his lurid story. As for Dick, he had bolted in an opposite direction, and a little later I found him cleaning boots in an outhouse, looking as if he were the darling most beloved by Innocence. He was quite ready for a halo and a stained-glass window. He was not aware how thoroughly I had studied the latest version of the first chapter of Genesis, so when I gently asked him whether he would be obliging enough to create for me a pouter pigeon, he became, without any attempt at gradation, the colour of beetroot. The generous tint did him credit.



CHAPTER V.

LOVELINESS is split up into millions and millions of particles, and each fragment, however strangely one may differ from another, is alive with the self-same soul. Continuity prospers in variety. The daffodil and the rainbow are kinsfolk. Consider for a moment the atom of beauty, chipped, as it were, from the elemental block, which we had before our eyes and deep down at heart, in the person of Barty during his early childhood. How closely he was related to the sunshine, his gaiety and his aureole of hair proclaimed with the tongue of resemblance; his eyes were first cousins to the heavens, to Canterbury Bells that are blue, and to many other flowers—many, because differing emotions in the boy had different effects upon the tint of those twin blossoms

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that daily opened and shut beneath a bank of forehead, snowdrop white in winter, wheat-gold in summer, when the lad's great kinsman had stared at him long and intently. Barty dwelt in the lily, and the lily rested a part of her completeness in Barty. To us, our son was an infantile Proteus, who, although incapable of the full magicanship suggested by the name, yet hinted in a tricksy fashion at all manner of shapes as he scampered about the lawns; his arms, lips, eyes, blouse, legs, and hair united to make up the figure of dishevelled Joy. Without ceasing, he had unconsciously forced me to spend thought upon the fundamental alliance between all material images, for had I not glimpsed him as a shrub in flower, a bird in flight, a meteor running the gauntlet between a pair of tremendous constellations? Had I not seen him ruling the sunset, shaped as a cloud, his overall rosy beyond description, his hair kissed into an almost unbearable dazzle by the great lips of his molten worshipper? Had I not

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beheld him flash in watery tumult down many a cataract, his blue blouse easily represented by the under-part of the flood, his locks by strands of foam touched to the right hue by the sun's blaze? Were Memory to revolt against her burden and demand from me a partial release, much that is precious in sort and in effect I would unstrap from her shoulders, but not the recollections clustering round the Barty of those few years when his prime made for his mother and for me fountains and fragrances.

Whatever their departures from righteousness, it seems to me that childless husbands and wives should deservedly be exempted from any scheme of vengeance which may possibly exist in the Hereafter, as an acknowledgment of their daily purgatory undergone in this forcing-house of heaven. Into thousands and thousands of homes Christ enters with the doctor, what time the old, old miracle is again performed. And the most poignant among all appeals has not been made to the soul of a man and of a woman till in their own

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private Bethlehem they welcome with wonder, with tears, and with laughter, a speechless saviour, whose very weakness is a strength in disguise, an incentive to spiritual uplifting, a magnet drawing to the cores of tenderness in the mother and the father all those flying fragments of the best, which hitherto have travelled in orbits apart from their central excellence. By wondrous love those precious particles are collected; through love they cohere. Blessed are the lintels and the side-posts which have been struck by a bunch of hyssop dripping with blood as a signal for the Angel of Death not to pause, not to enter, and not to slay! Blessed are the houses in which little children, all unwittingly, work wonders belonging to peace and love, civilising their elders, and making in the clouds rents through which the eyes of the parents may reach almost to the Mercy Seat! Weary falls the day in the huts and palaces where barrenness keeps the cradle empty. Small wonder if the unfruitful bosom aches!

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Barty's mother (my heart always leaps up at thought of her, as Wordsworth's used to leap whenever in the sky he beheld a rainbow) and I, not long after the boy's game of creation, experienced that sickness at heart which inhabits a sufferer when the hope of saving an exquisite life is at zero. As we stood hand in hand by the bed on which lay the fevered child, every surrounding of home and landscape and sky shrivelled into nothingness. Delight shrank into her most secret haunt as a touched snail draws backward into its shell, and we learned then for the first time how precariously the sword of bliss hung above our heads. Truly, it was held by a support even weaker than a single hair from all the golden harvest that had been reaped from our son's head by the scissors of necessity. A foretaste of death, or perhaps I should say, a temporary paralysis, overtook the senses of touch and smell. Keenly do I remember how I failed to catch the scent of sweet violets and lavender-water when I tried to obtain

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refreshment from them one day in Barty's room. Life was sharpened, so to speak, to a pencil-point. All within the range of my vision grows blurred even now, when memory establishes for me once more the dreadful dryness upon the mother's face as her spirit ran backward and forward between the altars of death and life. Yes, and the heavens reel! To say more were to ransack a sacred grief. But, thanks be to God, the Angel passed. For a moment, deceived by too faint marks upon our lintel and side-posts, he had halted, thinking to perform his duty. Were the authentic splashes absent? Not so. His immortal eyes must have seen Barty, and therefore, as he went away from our small paradise, hiding in the sheath the few bright inches of the steel drawn in doubt, I like to think he laughed gently with satisfaction to know his sword unblemished by the blood of our lamb.

Once or twice during the child's month of convalescence he harked back to his first

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love, astronomy, and the glitter of past homes danced, as I think, in his eyes during the moments when in a perplexed fashion he endeavoured to grasp the intangible, though there never arrived a flash of revelation to soften the upright pucker which stood at attention with soldierly straightness upon his forehead. As he strengthened he cared less to ponder, and all yearning for the things not of this earth seemed to perish. Rarely now did there skim across the blue lakes gleaming beneath his brows any starry ghost. The angel that troubled those waters was a workaday angel, the spirit of the commonplace, and swiftly flew his mother's thanks past racing comets toward the ineffable Priest.

It was at this stage of his life that Barty spent an exaggerated worship on white rats and hens, the latter of which he domesticated in a manner causing astonishment to all who had intimate knowledge of his feats as a fowl-tamer. Remembering his late illness, I

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am afraid we shrank too easily from crossing his whims, and did not interfere even when Barty took a hen to bed with him night after night, though the nurse was scandalised by such an exhibition of parental fondness run to seed. When, after the bitter passage of agonised hours, the pendulum with a joyful swish cleaves through the brain a journey back from the funereal to the sunlit pole, is it not almost too hard for human nature to maintain that policy of mingled roses and thorns which is vitally necessary if children are to be brought up in the right manner? While weakened by the revulsion of feeling, fathers and mothers too often depart from the true diplomacy. It is then that little souls run the risk of becoming bruised. Silly indulgences are like silly curses, and come home to roost. Viewing the question in all its aspects, I think we were very lucky to escape as easily as we did, for, if the truth must be told, during the weeks that were rich with Barty's recovery we shed affec-

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tionate follies as the elm sheds her leaves in late autumnal frosts. Sometimes punishment arrived in a queer shape. For example, I have a vivid remembrance of how, upon an afternoon when several rather prim callers, to whom we always wished to show a neat and orderly front, were enjoying the usual mixture of tea and gossip and buttered toast, two of Barty's black Spanish playmates, which had become as much members of the household as the more familiar pets, performed an unrehearsed effect with such thoroughness that our names were removed from the visiting-list of a certain spinster, whose faded looks did not harmonise well with the luxuriant verdure stitched upon her hat. Chancing to look toward the door, which had unfortunately been left a few inches open, while attending to the wants of my guests, I was flatly dismayed to see the fowls slowly wandering in the direction of the hearth-rug. Upon occasions they pecked at the carpet, deluded by the green threads, and even scratched it in

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the hope of finding insects beneath its surface. But these were only small delays. What were the best tactics to bring into operation? Fabian? Numidian? The moment needed its Napoleon. I thought within myself, If I attempt delicate strategy the creatures will be sure to dodge the door. I may possibly get a camel through the eye of a needle, but not two chickens, first retrieved from among the legs of chairs and the other impediments common to modern drawing-rooms, through the desired gap. If I ring the bell, an entering maid will cause the intruders to come into sight even more quickly; if I myself attempt to open the door wider I shall be bound to separate the birds, and then may never be able to shepherd them again. If looks could have killed those fowls! If wishes could have wrung their necks! As it was, the moment failed of its Napoleon, and I acted with helplessness. Meanwhile the exposure came nearer and nearer, and I found myself wondering about the exact warmth of

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the disgust about to appear on the highly-correct faces. My look of acute resignation drew the eyes of the sweetest hostess in the world, and her lifted brows asked me a question. I signalled that danger was behind her. She glanced in the direction of the door, but, as the hens were at that moment passing under the tunnel made by the sofa, she saw nothing to discompose her. All of a sudden the more inquisitive of the fowls came out into the open, close against a nervous old lady. It pecked at her bright boot. She looked down, pierced my ears and my heart with a sound which for want of a better term I am forced to describe as a vocal rapier, and spilled a scalding stream of tea upon the bird's back. The frightened creature rose in the air (I missed it with both barrels—the tea-cosy and a cushion—bagging instead my favourite Worcester vase!) and made straight for the only green stuff it could see, naturally associating this tint with freedom. When it lodged for a moment upon Miss Weston's

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hat, I confess I used a word not belonging to my daily vocabulary, exasperated, though quite illogically, to observe with what quickness the dragon-teeth sown by indulgence had sprung up into full-armed nuisances. The visitors for a brief time drifted from their mental moorings, all the invisible cables having parted. Some screamed, several dropped their cups and saucers. Tables, kettle, ornaments were upset. At this point of misery the other fowl rose into the air with a disorganised cackle, whizzed at headlong speed straight toward the window, and went crashing through the glass, with the result that it fell, its neck broken (for which I was truly thankful), into a bush of lavender. Barty, who happened to be playing outside on the lawn, as soon as he was able to realise his bereavement, did his utmost to shatter the heavens by his howlings. In an atmosphere made up of reproaches, hysterics, sal volatile, broken china, steaming carpets, and bustling maids, a man was evidently

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out of place, so, abusing fortune with unfeigned heartiness, I went to administer comfort to Barty, whose keening had already collected the gardener, Dick, and the stablemen, thinking as I stepped on to the grass how disgusted the cats would be at having to witness another funeral so soon after the interment of the lamented Neptune. Perhaps it was cowardly not to halve the frigid farewells with Barty's mother. A certain taint in Adam's character has come down to his male progeny with faithfulness worthy of a finer object.

After the lesson learned by suffering this Spanish invasion—an unauthorised raid which left me fully twenty-five pounds poorer—I decided to curtail Barty's list of household pets, a decision confirmed the next morning by the discovery that the surviving filibuster had laid an egg in my waste-paper basket. Using all possible gentleness, and taking pains not to spend too much eyesight upon the boy's quivering lips, lest I should grow weak

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in my resolve, I pronounced a decree absolute against a too familiar treatment of hens and white rats, even refusing to be present at the mortuary when the remains of the dead fowl were committed to their last sleep in the close neighbourhood of Neptune. Because in my study that night a beautiful historian sat for long upon my knee, I know that pressure was once more brought to bear upon the cats, that once more they disgraced their lineage by using abandoned language and by bolting in the middle of the ceremony. The position of chief mourner was yielded to the sister of the corpse, a bird that callously foraged in the upturned soil while the ashes of her relative were being buried. Among her remembered proverbs she evidently counted the saying that it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

The next enemy to Barty's dwindling remembrance of an earlier existence spent in some other heavenly district was mischievousness so fertile that a partial cure was only

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brought about by punishment of a severe kind. Severity was compelled to arrive, bringing her birch with her. Times without number did Barty, by means of diplomacy against which it was downright hard labour to struggle, contrive to patch up treaties with me. There was the Silver Watch Treaty, for example. This was ratified when at last the rogue revealed his sin, and confessed that he had hidden the housemaid's watch under a footstool in a friend's drawing-room fully a mile away, where he had placed it while his mother chatted with the lady upon whom she was paying a call. It was pretty to hear him make a clean breast of his naughty behaviour, and tell the maid how sorry he was for causing her so much vexation. Could Bunyan's deadliest giant have remained brutal when beamed upon by this small angel's conquering face? I think not. Again, there was the Conservatory Oil-Stove Treaty, signed, sealed, and delivered (kisses stood for the signatures and the wax) after the confession of a trick which

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resulted in the loss of several delicate and lovely foreigners, plants quite unable to bear our climate unless helped at night by artificial heat. Furthermore, there was the Treaty of the Pyramid Balls, twelve of which Barty put under a besotted fowl that laboured to hatch them despite their absurd unlikeness to all the eggs known to her by experience.

Had it not been for his mother (let me again give a proof that the founder of my family used to live in Eden), I should have beaten this golden-haired monkey long before he shamed me grievously in the eyes of his godfather, who was no less a person than the Bishop of the diocese. Here follows a short history dealing with that bitter moment. It happened on a Sunday. While I was helping the Bishop to some pie, the conversation chanced to be so absorbing that mental sight blinded eyesight, a not infrequent occurrence with those persons whose concentrative powers are abnormally developed. Because all my thoughts were humming round the subject at

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issue, I utterly failed to notice that, together with some legitimate contents of the dish, I had helped his lordship to Japhet and an evergreen tree, two items from the equipment of a Noah's Ark given to the godson by the very victim of the prank. I was astonished when I saw the angel of the house leave her seat, walk up to the Bishop's side, and bend down to examine his plate. When I realised the necessity for her action, I was supremely vexed. Barty should be beaten in the presence of his crime. The better the day the better the deed. The Bishop, true to his pacific calling, protested against reprisals, but in vain. As for the child's mother, she, reading my face, kept silence. I rang a great peal on the bell so as to summon the maid, whom, because parish affairs of a semi-private nature were being discussed at the table, we had purposely sent out of the room. She came in looking flurried. Since she had been in our service such a riot of clapper and bell had never astounded the folk in the kitchen,

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and she was at a loss to account for the din.

"Tell nurse to bring Master Barty here immediately, just as he is."

"Master Barty's in bed, sir."

"Be so good as to hold your tongue. Take the message."

A few minutes passed, during which I took very good care not to gaze into eyes that, as I felt in my soul, were pregnant with beseeching.

"I think," said the Bishop, "I really think a reprimand will meet the case."

"No, Bishop," I answered. "This is the last straw. The camel collapses. Reprimands are of no use when the last straw is concerned."

I had scarcely finished speaking when the sinner arrived. The nurse put him down just inside the door, and he began to come slowly toward me in answer to my beckoning finger. Since he advanced as if he were a snail, I went to meet him, holding the Bishop's plate in my hand and pointing to the evidence of

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his guilt. I shall never forget the way in which Barty looked at Japhet. Comedy and tragedy wrestled together in that glance.

"Did you put this rubbish in the pie, sir?"

Barty began to exercise the diplomacy which had always before been so happy in effect. He tugged at my merciful instincts with a hundred magnets. But there was to be no Treaty of the Evergreen. The list of broken pledges was already too long.

"Did you, sir?"

The goldfinch nodded his perfect head.

I put the culprit across my knees, none too gently, as I knew from a quick sigh breathed at the other end of the table, and took pains to make the punishment salutary by reason of its sting. As I beat the boy my eyes caught the sparkle of a diamond, for his mother had shut out the sight with her hands. I had time to notice also that the Bishop was nervously pushing bread-crumbs together with the little finger of his left hand, and somehow this action, even more than

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the abandonment displayed by the sinner's mother, made me hate myself for using a giant's strength upon so weak a child.

"Now beg the Bishop's pardon."

This done in a sobbing stutter, Barty ran toward her whom he regarded as a sure and merciful refuge, crying out—

"Oh, m-m-mammy, kiss me!"

"Please do nothing of the kind, dearest," I said, forcing my tongue to contradict my heart.

"Take him away, nurse."

The rest of the dinner-time passed without smiles, despite the Bishop's reference to the laying-on of hands and his mock compliment to me for making so appropriate a use of Palm Sunday. My discomfort was not lessened as I reviewed my past conduct and saw only too clearly how much more I deserved a thrashing as a flabby politician in the affairs of bringing up my son in a proper mode than did the scapegoat so recently bundled off by me into the wilderness of grief, there to expiate my offence against just dealing.

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An hour later I went upstairs to see if the boy had fallen asleep. He was wide awake, and as I walked toward his bed he cried out—

“Daddy!”

“Yes, Barty?”

“Bend down, please, Daddy.”

Be sure I bent down with great willingness. He flung forgiving arms round my neck.

“Are you going to be a good boy tomorrow, Rainbow?”

“I’m going to be better than you wouldn’t think I could,” said Barty.


For such a promise what recompense was due? The kiss of full and frank forgiveness? I thought so. As it dropped down upon Barty’s lips, I heard the welcome rustle of a dress (will my heart never learn to be quiet when love arrives in that sound?), and knew that the other member of the small syndicate owning the human treasure had crept upstairs to make the self-same sign

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upon the dear mouth belonging to the precious fugitive from a star worlds and worlds and worlds away. When he heard where we had been, the Bishop's eyes simply sparkled. Really, no other verb will do him justice. He looked so actively benevolent that I was more than half-inclined to put in front of him my arguments in favour of a cleansed Bible. This, however, I was prevented from doing by memory, for upon a certain occasion it had been my lot to see the prelate, if something less than in a towering anger, at least in a mood stark to a forbidding degree. As I knew that the Berserker and the theologian were nearly equal contributories to his blood, I thought it well to bear in mind the counsel with regard to sleeping dogs. Let benevolent bishops also lie.



CHAPTER VI.

O we not nearly all wish that kittens would remain kittens? And are not many flowers more beautiful in bud than in blossom? Month after month joined the majority, and the mingled tragedy and comedy of Barty's lengthening legs proceeded at far too rapid a rate for his parents' enjoyment, though pride in his goodly stature softened somewhat the regret caused by his gradual departure from the sunniest and most entertaining stage in his life. The runaway's course was marked by little heaps of clothes that had become too small for him. Each now impossible vest, each conquered blouse, was, as it were, a grave in which some peculiar sweetness, most fragrant at the time when our son was able to wear these garments, lay buried. To Barty's mother, the first pair of

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knickerbockers which his growth made useless represented a veritable Sedan. Ah, but it was grievous to come to terms with Time! There was a sacred drawer—the adjective is not a whit too strong—devoted to these vanishings from the child. Lavender, breathing exquisitely, lay with them in muslin bags, for fear lest a desecrating moth should nibble so much as a single thread in any among these memorials proving the brave increase of the prince. When Love used to look in this drawer—and sometimes my heart ached because I so often found her musing there—then, then she glimpsed the speechless baby lying amid the husks of babyhood; the unsteady prattler, rich beyond Sinbad's diamond valley in the possession of two or three pretended words; the chatterbox with a tongue like Tennyson's brook. Well, seeing these dear shapes, perhaps it was small wonder that her eyes were suffused with tears. Horatius on the bridge never so resolutely carved enemies for Rome as the keeper of that drawer

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would have battled for its contents, had the need come for her to defend the treasure. Opening it, she looked into a kaleidoscope, at the bottom of which Barty flashed and flew and blossomed during her gaze in ten thousand subtly different guises. Show me if you can a more resistless Juggernaut than Nature. She rolls on, and rolls on. We, passionately anxious not to see Barty escape from the chrysalis of childish perfection, wished to keep the boy a golden cub. Nature, on the other hand, filched brightness from his hair, and several degrees of chubbiness from his face, incessantly pushing him in the direction of the normal English schoolboy of gentle birth and clean nurture. When he was a few weeks past his sixth birthday, I, for the last time, examined him with regard to the sky-patch between the two elms, and watched with intentness the earnest little face as the boy looked for a bright word in the dictionary of the heavens. In vain Barty screwed up his eyes. To change the figure, what sponge,

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I wonder, had wiped the star from off the indigo slate on which it had sparkled so long? Who had made Barty a bankrupt?

When the boy's life-clock struck ten, it was necessary for his mother and myself to make that sacrifice which means such poignant suffering for parents to whom only one living link between earth and heaven has been granted. It is easy to manufacture prigs and milksops; it is easy to turn out complete in every objectionable detail arrogant and selfish descendants; and among the tools peculiarly effective in bringing this result to pass are to be counted fathers and mothers of a fatal pliancy, adoring servants, luxuries at beck and call, the lack of obstacles to overcome, and the want of human standards by which to measure powers of brain and muscle. Barty was strong and clever, but he was evidently in need of those tonics which only experience could administer to him. He needed to meet his match. The voice of selfish love advised us to keep our darling

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at our knees; and the temptation to accept the counsel was acute. But since the prevailing voice was that of reasoning love, we determined to send Barty to a preparatory school a hundred miles distant from our familiar worship, where, as we trusted, he would learn many a salutary lesson not printed between the covers of the primers. The grammar of daily life as lived by pleasant and unpleasant opponents in classes and in games and in squabbles would surely prove advantageous to him, especially since he had been taught without ceasing to control his temper. The handicap, therefore, was not unfavourable. Less cruel than ordinary boys; instructed not to despise other children merely because their luck had surrounded them with poorer circumstances than his own; humanised one degree more by his deep love for flowers, Barty entered with unusual promise upon his opening campaign as a raw recruit in parts foreign from the lawns where he had so long ruled as king. Early in May our Battle

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of Waterloo was fought; and we underwent a reverse, if defeated hearts and eyes may be allowed to represent flags captured and batteries lost. The night before the beginning of Barty's exile, as we looked love in all bounteousness upon the sleeper who made for us the half of our bliss, his mother and I promised to bear the parting with outward resolution, not then knowing the full pangs, not knowing with exactness how fixedly this human ivy had looped itself round and round our hearts. I trembled when I watched the leave-taking between my two angels—trembled at the shock of finding them incalculably more precious than I had thought them even in my most exulting hour; and for a moment my soul was deafened by the noise of rending hopes and shattering paradises; for suddenly it was given me to understand, as in a flash, the agony sure to follow upon their loss. The more complete is human joy, the more closely it resembles a venomous snake. Asleep at the innermost coil of bliss lies the

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serpent destined to strike. When will it awake; when rear its head; when deliver the stroke? They who dwell as gods in a lovely household must the sharplier feel the sting, since an exquisite sacrament must be redeemed by an exquisite agony when the time for severance on earth is come. Thus by the Paymaster beyond the skies has the cost been fixed. But, ah, the moments when within us the harp of that black remembrance is swept by threatening fingers! Those bitter moments!

The natural elasticity of boyhood soon asserted itself as the train rushed along between orchards white with blossoming pears and cherries. When spring and summer marry, what millions of bridesmaids go to the wedding! Before he was five miles away from his mother's face of grief, Barty had clambered into the hat-rack, where he scrutinised with great care a golden pound which one of his aunts had given him for the purchase of a cricket bat and a pair of pads.

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Flowers plucked from the parent stalk soon revive when put into water. In Barty's case novelty stood for water. Speaking for myself, never had the whizzing telegraph posts bothered my eyes so much. After making trial of the other hat-rack, and after having learned his sovereign by heart, so to put the matter, Barty condescended to sit on my knee and disclose the name of the manufacturer with whom he intended to place his order for his cricketing outfit. I begged him to send me a post-card as soon as he made a century, and at once he entered in his mental pocket-book a note of my request, too serious to suspect an ironical flavour in my words. What with Barty's queer comments upon the galloping landscape; his thousand and one references to the watch I had bought for him; his several gropings under the seats to search for the money dropped during his gloatings over the silver hunter; and his frequent bird-like pecks at my cheek, the time passed so rapidly that I was

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astonished when we arrived at our journey's end. A few hours later I was being carried home at express speed, beauty and love behind me, love and beauty in front. Before the point of farewell was reached, some of his schoolfellows had, with swelling pride, shown Barty the cricket pitch, and, in consequence, he was so charmed that he was able to part from me with a heroism for which I was thankful. I had been vain enough to fear a tempest. Signs of April weather were in his face, it is true, but though the boy's eyes were so full of tears that an overflow seemed inevitable, he struggled against his inclination, and at my last looking showed me a countenance that was a lovely compromise between shower and shine. He had already learned the first letter in the alphabet of manhood.

When I reached home I found the elder angel sitting on the hearth-rug in my study, searching, you may be sure, among the glowing masses of coal for Barty's face; and

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she was cheered not a little by the history of his brave farewell, insisting upon the closest details. In presenting her with these, I had the better of the bargain, for she paid me an extravagant price in Cupid's coin of the realm, fresh from a rosy mint.

I have had some uninviting weeks in the course of my life, but I think the first two or three following the transfer of Barty from home to school, packed as they were with dull feelings of rebellion against necessity, stand supreme as regards discomfort of mind and heart. I never knew before that May could be an ugly month. My happiness was far from being increased by the knowledge that I had a companion in misfortune. Who could have believed that Barty was so terribly dear? Unless I had personally experienced the slow torture inflicted by the boy's exile, I could not have imagined the unbridgeable width of the gulf yawning between the presence and absence of a child. And to think that all our parental love was

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perforce centred upon a single human flower! How the heart raced when the lengthy catalogues of disease and chance were remembered! Things which did not matter in the least when Barty was a daily member of the household now changed into small annoyances; and in a hundred different ways I found myself becoming restless, exacting, and, to be quite candid, even snappish. It is a positive fact that creases in the table cloth vexed me; and, in a moment of silly heat, I once went so far as to compel the maid to undo her work at the eleventh hour, much to her surprise, since I had never before interfered with regard to such a female concern as rumpled linen for the table. As for the pictures on the walls, all of them seemed askew, and although I went from frame to frame for the purpose of making precise adjustments, I was never wholly satisfied by the results achieved. I began to fall into the vile habit of keeping a sharp eye out for defects, instead of helping the

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in the house by carrying a bright face about the passages; by humming snatches of song to cheer her; and by hoisting numberless signals of wise and sweet fellowship. Luckily I was quick to discover the invasion of the bear into my nature. I soon mended my ways, and was forgiven well-nigh before I had acknowledged my full pettiness, receiving so beautiful a pardon that I was almost thankful to have been a sinner. The apparent increase in the weight of my books was another sign of disorder due to the flying of the young bird from the nest. Had the volumes upon my shelves been cast in lead they could not well have been heavier, or so it seemed to me at this time; and it always needed a marked effort of will to resume the studies which had been so refreshing when the voice and whims and embraces of Barty had been factors of delight. Just as a bee will hover near a foxglove, uncertain at which honeyed grotto to pay his first call, so I used to hover about my desk, taking

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long to settle, though when we were all three together I had never found any difficulty in making a brisk beginning with foolscap immediately after breakfast. Stilly hours of learning were not the drugs to heal me. The right medicine lay in rousing activities, an opinion in which the other sufferer manifestly agreed, for from morning to night she chased the rabbit of domesticity with all the fatal thoroughness of a weasel.

One evening, about six weeks after Barty's flitting, a quick rustle of skirts crossed from the door of my study to the chair in which I was seated, and the voice of the coming angel said—"Dearest!"

I purposely made no answer, so that she might hail me again with equal emphasis. Her hand, as if it were a white dove, fluttered down upon my shoulder.—"Dearest!"

"Well?"

"I have come to say that I must, and will, have Barty home for a little holiday at half term."

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"Must and will? Hoighty-toighty! Madam is in her airs."

"Besides," she proceeded, taking no notice of my remarks, "you want him as much as I do."

"This is flat magic. Is my girl also among the prophets?"

"You know you do."

"Well, as I have never yet found you out in a fib, I suppose I must believe you to be telling the truth now."

"Goose!"

"Thank you! Take a knee, Treasure. Now we can discuss this knotty point in comfort. Don't you think it will be a serviceable discipline for us to endure till the end of the term? Won't having the boy here for a day or two be like opening an old wound?"

"The wound has never closed."

"Like adding fresh width and depth to it, then?"

"His presence will be oil for the hurt. He shall come."

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"Not so fast, you sweet little comet! Since when did Cæsar's wife issue Cæsar's orders? I believe I am nursing a woman who promised to obey me."

"I was a girl of nineteen then, and could not possibly answer for a mother. Be a dear thing, and give up teasing me at once. I have a secret to tell you."

"I know it already. The fishmonger has not sent the salmon for dinner. Let him be beheaded in the courtyard below."

"If you won't be serious, I shall go. I can't sit here talking nonsense all the evening, especially when you make such dreadful holes in your socks."

"Well, what is the secret? Fetch it forth."

"I have already written to Mr. Salton telling him to send Barty on Friday. He will return on Monday."

She stroked my hair as she confessed her conduct, knowing from experience the gentling effect of the treatment. Her petticoat diplomacy was full of such blandishments.

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"Pardon me if I appear breathless. If it would not oppress you, I should be glad to have that statement repeated."

"It's true."

"I quite believe it, you female Guy Fawkes! How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a plotting wife! I suppose I must wire to Salton to disregard your letter——"

"Rupert!"

"And send Barty on Thursday instead of Friday."

"You dear!"

"However, I can only do this on one condition—a condition which must be rigidly observed. It will be best for us to understand each other quite clearly at the outset, so that no bickering shall take place in the future."

She turned on my knee to look into my eyes. The soul of seriousness lived upon her face.

"Bickering is a good word," she said; "a very good word. What's the condition?"

"Don't be so impetuous, child. There must be no loophole for a wriggling exit later on."

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"I don't care a pin what the condition is so long as Barty may come home for a few days."

"A wise general counts the cost."

"A loving mother pays it. I shall pull your hair till you tell me your terms."

"And I shall put you in the corner till supper-time."

"Tell me, please. What is the condition?"

"This, Tyrant. That Barty goes back to school on Tuesday instead of Monday. Are you happy?"

"Tremendously!"

"I suppose the whole length and breadth of England might be searched in vain for such another spoiled girl. I am preparing a rod for my own back."

"It will be pickled in love, then."

"That's right. Don't go, there's a dear."

"I really must. Holes in socks don't mend themselves automatically."

"Let a maid fetch them for you, and so kill two birds—companionship and restoration—

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with one stone. By the way, harking back for a moment to what we were discussing just now, there's another thing I want to mention."

"Very well."

"I object strongly to your putting damp sheets on Barty's bed. Oblige me, for once, by not doing so."

"What else, Cæsar?"

"A petal from the rose," I said, kissing her on the mouth.

So Barty came home. Before he had been five minutes in the house he requested me to feel his biceps. I did so, and was duly petrified. He also submitted for my approval a butterfly which had been tattooed on the calf of his right leg; and he evinced the liveliest pleasure when I called him a young savage. Chingachook he revered; Uncas was his idol. After he had paid a flying visit to the kitchen and also to the stables, at each of which centres he could not have been more warmly welcomed had he won the battle of Omdurman, and had greeted—a little contemptuously—his

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pets, he overwhelmed us with chatter of the cricket field, till our heads ached with the effort to distinguish hero from hero, Outsiders from Swells, Corkers from Yorkers. To this day his mother is not at all clear with regard to the exact difference between sneaks and tweaks. Nor can she understand even now why Butter-legs has not an equal vogue with Butterfingers. About half-past seven, Barty, putting on his most emancipated air, told me he was going into the High Street in order to purchase an evening paper, for he was full of thrills caused by a struggle between two eminent counties. With the return of the boy from school there came upon me a wish to work, so I went into my study and began to frown over some astronomical calculations. I had not long been bent to this labour when I saw Barty come rushing up the garden path as if pursued by twenty bulls, or by Magua with all his tribe. Bursting into the house, he came clattering and panting into my room, evidently set upon acquainting me with an electrifying perform-

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ance due to the batting or bowling virtue of some cricketing hero. I turned round to receive Barty's impact with a full front, for it was his custom sometimes to behave as an avalanche. He waved a halfpenny print round his head in triumph. It might have been the Oriflamme of Navarre. To look at him was to be infected by his enthusiasm, so superbly had delight swelled his muscles, so royally had pride coloured his cheeks with blood that for a few moments conquered the tan of summer, or, rather, combined to make with it his cheeks show a pair of flags in hue partly russet, partly crimson.

"Hoo-jolly-rah!" he shouted, a barbarian in speech as in emotion. "Never mind your rotten old stars, Dad! A chap who used to be at our school has knocked a century for Sussex. He carted Richardson all over the shop!"

While cutting an elaborate caper, during which he looked as if he were a windmill gone mad, he upset the ink over my figures.

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Rotten old stars, indeed! The brew of the poppies had done its work only too well, and Barty had changed to a veneered savage from the child mysteriously allied by frailest ropes of memory to a star not visible in the heavens for those who had outgrown the years of fairyhood, even though the human sight asked help from a lens empowered to sack numberless starry cities in the firmament.

Barty, Barty, how hast thou fallen, son of my joy's morning!

FINIS.

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